

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5199

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJ: BANGLADESH CELEBRATES LIBERATION DAY

SUMMARY: BANGLADESH CELEBRATED THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF ITS FREEDOM ON DECEMBER 16. THE PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH STRUCK A SOMEWHAT GLOOMY NOTE WHICH WAS HEIGHTENED BY THE EXPLOSION OF TERRORIST BOMBS IN DACCA AND ELSEWHERE. END SUMMARY.

1. BANGLADESH CELEBRATED THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF ITS "LIBERATION" ON DECEMBER 16 IN BEFITTING FASHION. THERE WAS AN EARLY MORNING CEREMONY AT LAHORE WHERE THOSE WHO DIED IN 1971 WERE HONORED. A MILITARY REVIEW, HIGHLIGHTED BY A PROCESSION OF TEN T-54 TANKS AND A FLY-PAST OF SIX MIG-21MF AIRCRAFT, WAS HELD IN FRONT OF THE YET-TO BE COMPLETED ASSEMBLY BUILDING. ELSEWHERE IN DACCA AND OUTLYING TOWNS THERE ARE SPORTING EVENTS AND SEMINARS, OFFERING

THOSE WHO WISHED TO MARK THE DAY WITH ACTION EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
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WITH THOSE WHO FOUND WORDS MORE APPROPRIATE.

2. THE KEY EVENT WAS A LENGTHY ADDRESS BY THE PRIMIN, SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN. SPEAKING ON THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 15, THE PRIMIN SPENT MUCH OF HIS TIME REHEARSING NOW FAMILIAR THEMES. HE DESCRIBED THE RAVAGED BANGLADESH WHICH EMERGED FROM THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE AND NOTED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HAD RESTORED COMMUNICATIONS, REVIVED PRODUCTION, AND SOUGHT TO INSURE FOOD SUPPLIES THROUGH IMPORTS. HOWEVER, HE STRESSED THAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY HAMPERED BY (1) INFLATION, REFLECTING WORLD-WIDE PRICE RISES, (2) NATURAL DISASTERS, MOST PARTICULARLY FLOODS WHICH RESULTED FROM PAKISTAN'S FAILURE TO DEAL WITH FLOOD CONTROL, AND (3) ECONOMIC CRIMES SUCH AS SMUGGLING, BLACKMARKETEERING AND BRIBERY. SHEIKH MUJIB SAID THAT THE BDG WAS DEALING WITH THE SMUGGLERS AND BLACKMARKETEERS -"BEASTS IN THE GARB OF MEN"-AND HAD PLANS FOR FLOOD CONTROL. COMMENTING ON ASSISTANCE TO BANGLADESH WHEN CONFRONTED WITH NATURAL DISASTERS, THE PRIMIN SAID THAT WHILE "FRIENDS" HAD RESPONDED, "COMMENSURATE WITH OUR NEEDS, THIS ASSISTANCE WAS QUITE INSIGNIFICANT." HE FAULTED THE WORLD PRESS FOR FOCUSING ON STARVATION DEATHS RATHER THAN APPEALING FOR ASSISTANCE AND SAID IT "DOLED OUT EMPTY ADVICE TO SUFFERING PEOPLE."

3. THE PRIMIN WAS NOT UNRELIEVEDLY BLEAK IN HIS COMMENTS. HE NOTED THAT BANGLADESH HAS "BRIGHT PROSPECT" OF FINDING OIL IN ITS COASTAL AREAS AND ALSO THAT "A NEW HORIZON OF POSSIBILITIES HAS OPENED UP IN RELATIONS WITH OUR ARAB BRETHREN". HOWEVER, THESE TWO VERY BRIEF REFERENCES STOOD OUT IN CONSIDERABLE CONTRAST TO THE BULK OF THE SPEECH. PERHAPS THE MOST STRIKING COMMENT, AND THE ONE WHICH UNDERScoreD THE SPEECH'S BASICALLY PESSIMISTIC TONE, WAS THAT CONDEMNING "MISCREANTS", AND POINTING OUT THAT "THREE THOUSAND AWAMI LEAGUE LEADERS, WORKERS AND INNOCENT VILLAGERS, INGWUDING FOUR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT" HAD DIED AT THE HANDS OF TERRORISTS OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS.

4. COMMENT: THAT SHEIKH MUJIB'S SPEECH WAS ESSENTIALLY A LITANY IS HARDLY SURPRISING. THIS PAST SUMMER'S FLOODS WERE COSTLY, PLACING FRESH STRAINS ON BANGLADESH'S VERY LIMITED RESOURCES. HOWEVER, THE CONSEQUENCES OF MALADMINISTRATION AND ILL-CONCEIVED POLICIES, PARTICULARLY IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD, ALSO CONTINUED TO BE REVEALED IN INCREASINGLY BOLD RELIEF, AND CONTRIBUTED MATERIAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ALLY TO THE STEADY EROSION IN THE POPULARITY OF AND SUPPORT FOR THE AWAMI LEAGUE. THE CONSTITUTIONAL OPPOSITION REMAINED AN INEFFECTIVE CRITIC AND GAVE NO SIGN OF PROVIDING AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE RULING PARTY. THE OPPOSITION IS STILL SHUFFLING AROUND TRYING TO FIND COMMON GROUND FOR UNITED ACTION, BUT ITS OWN DIVISIONS - AND THOSE INSPIRED, WE UNDERSTAND, BY SHEIKH MUJIB - CONTINUE TO PREVENT IT FROM ORGANIZING ITSELF ADEQUATELY TO MOBILIZE THE PUBLIC.

5. THE PRIMIN'S REFERENCE TO THE ACTIONS OF "MISCREANTS" MAY SUGGEST WHERE HE SEES HIS IMMEDIATE THREAT. OVER THE LAST FIVE OR SIX DAYS, DACCA AND SUCH SMALLER CITIES AS NARAYANGANJ, JESSORE, RAJSHAHI (THE INDIAN ASSISTANT HIGH COMMISSION THERE WAS ONE TARGET), AND BARISAL HAVE EXPERIENCED BOMBINGS; IN DACCA, THE MOST PROMINENT TARGETS WERE THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THE OFFICES OF SHEIKH FAZLUL HAQ MONT'S NEWSPAPERS, BANGLADESH TIMES AND BANGLAR BANI. SO FAR THE BOMBINGS HAVE CAUSED ONLY LIMITED DAMAGE AND FEW INJURIES, BUT THEY ARE AN UGLY PORTENT AS BANGLADESH BEGINS ITS FOURTH YEAR OF INDEPENDENCE. CERTAINLY THESE TERRORIST ACTS WILL GIVE A MEASURE OF ADDED VIGOR TO THE ADVOCATES OF A MORE AUTHORITARIAN PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM.

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